

# A Flutter of Fans

By BLANCHE McMANUS.

**D**ID fans give birth to game cards, or did the hand of cards evolve itself into the fan? Their constructive principles are the same. Spread out a bridge hand and you at once have the fan. Spread out the fan, says the Spaniard, and you have not merely a single hand of cards but a whole deck with which to play any variation in the game of life.

With this *fagotto* of tapering, silvery little sticks for finger play you may tap out

masks; ten thousand of the wise ladies of the court spread the fashion throughout the land, says the chronicle.

In this manner the fan was launched and China still remains the chief productive center. First the fan was a rigid oval, later becoming half moon shaped but still immovable on its single stem when, at a recent day in fan annals, the collapsible fan was invented in Korea in the fifteenth century, brought to China and from there spread by the manufacturers all over the warm countries of the Mediterranean.

The Spaniards, intriguers ever and with a passionate love for the secretive dallies and philanderings, from love making to business, which characterizes the race of *dons* and *hidalgos*, seized with avidity upon the fan when this handy article arrived in trading ships returning from the China seas.

The Spaniard diverted the warlike ceremonial, liturgical and useful functions of this really attractive accessory of dress and soon developed it into something far more abstruse and complicated than even the patient Celestials ever dreamed. It became a dictionary of fluttering wind swept symbolic emotions.

Spain thus brought into being at the very early date of the beginning of the fifteenth century the cipher code of the fan, an application which antedated the Morse code by more than 400 years. You may, if you have a taste for ancient politics, dig deep into the Spanish archives and still find hidden away, practically undecipherable into modern reading, old, crabbéd secret codes compiled from the fan dictionary which would provide some puzzling decoding for the experts of the telegraph and wireless of our time.

Fan talk thus became a serious affair in Spain as it was employed in everyday affairs of men and in politics quite as much as by fair ladies in their digital *correspondencia* and proved to be the first aerial waves to dip into intrigues and plots and leave none of the traps of written words on paper which might later be produced as tangible evidence in courts of justice, whether the case be secular, political or of the heart.

Thus fan tappers in court and in love, as well as the man fan tapper in the street, were immune from any incriminating evidence which might echo indiscreetly down the ages.

Later the fan dictionary became a medium for still further social amenities, the ultimate, of course, being love making in secret, at least as a means leading thereto in some more tangible, expressionable form. As social intercourse between men and women in Spain is a dumb letter to all practical purposes, and is, as it always has been, confined to flirtations through barred windows or from balconies, the fan as a transmitting medium for an embryonic wireless was hailed as joyfully by these etiquette sequestered young women as the broadcasting radios are to-day blissfully captured by wireless amateurs possessed of a desire to know the next change in Paris modes, what pill to take at the full moon, the latest straight into the receiver sermon or the newest jazz step and tune.

Spanish young folk who would be socially and eternally ostracized if they sat and talked together decently at home, even in presence of *la familia*, still are able to wing their tenderest emotions and throw their most intimate heart throbs, by the flutterings of many fans, to the four winds of heaven, across streets, across theater and opera auditoriums and across the *plaza de toros* or bullring.

The shorthand code of the fan as the Spaniards have designed it is a double system of signaling which is keyed thus:

The palm of the left hand is what is known as the "receiver" and carries the capital letters, not only capital letters in the sense in which these words are usually

used, but as capital letters in which to express the important words of the secretly compiled "Code of the Fan." The important part of the message to be communicated is thus spelled out on the left palm receiver. The left palm also is used to represent the hours of the clock face, and consequently this gives the Roman numerals without further complication.

Each articulation, or joint, of the left hand as seen from the palm side is made to carry a capital letter, these beginning, naturally, at where the hand itself begins—at the wrist.

Here the maker of Spanish fan codes opens fire with a great strategical move by placing the letters in the palm in reversed order, starting as he does with the tail end of the alphabet. He puts the Z at the joint of the left thumb base as it joins the wrist, and following up the pole of the thumb H comes at the second joint, B is at the third joint, while A finishes at the point of the thumb.

The pole of the first finger of the left palm has P at the base joint, L at the second joint, C at the third joint, with E at the finish of the first finger. The second finger left palm has T as a base, S at the second joint, D at third joint and I for the finish. The pole of the third finger has R for its base, and this is important, as it carries the wedding ring. M is at the second joint, F at the third joint and O for the finish.

The pole of the little finger and the fourth finger carries J for the base, N for the second joint, G for the third joint and U for the finish. In the rhomboid of the left palm proper, between the first and second fingers is Y, between the second and third fingers X and between the third and fourth fingers V, while Q closes this unique fan dictionary as a glove is buttoned with a single press clasp, at the wrist.

This arrangement with its variations works out for the right palm, with the important difference that the letters are mapped out on the back, or outside, of the hand. These too indicate the small letters, the lower case in printers' parlance, and are used therefore for messages of lesser importance. The right hand is the covering plate and represents also the minutes dial.

The fan itself is the counter, or marker, for one might style it the gavel that dots and dashes off the suggested words by its taps, the adding machine in this busy business of making conversation by wind signs and signals. The signaling fan when properly made is composed of thirty sticks, or ribs, including the two outside sticks.

The fan in addition to ticking off the code is used for figuring up sums. For example: when asked as to what your losses may have been at bridge you simply open up and close your fan at the number of sticks required to tell the sad tally: if 3,000 pesetas, you just flop your fan open at thirty, then ten and then another ten. No elaborate *maquinaria* could do the job quicker or better, but the *maquinista* should be expert and discreet, as is the Spanish woman's way, or *ilimay* befall.

So it is that if the beautiful, flashing, black eyed *senorita* with the white mantilla and talcum whitened face who sits across the bullring on the *sotabya* side, with the *amante* who is nearest to the momentary goal of her affections a few tiers of seats away, wishes, Spanish style, to make an appointment to see him for a few rare minutes of real talk she does it after this fashion: On her left palm she taps out the place of their tryst, which is to be, say, within the shadowy *entrada* of the Iglesia San Sebastian of a Friday, the great majority of these lovers' meetings being within the church as they invariably go to morning mass, the lover being privileged to two sorts of vows.

This being the important part of her communication, she spells it out in *CAPS* on her left hand and then proceeds to say that she will have as *duena* Aunt Pilar, sending out this second item of news in *lower case* from her right hand as being the hand of lesser information, seldom used for "stop press" news.

The astute receiver of her message learns by this that Aunt Pilar is a negligible quantity as a *duena*, as in addition to being very devout she is near-sighted and very deaf, thus tacitly evoking an unrivaled occasion for billing and cooing.

Thirdly, the *senorita* gives the time of the meeting. The *joven*, or young man, sees that three ribs of the *senorita's* fan are open, with her fan resting on the left hand; that is the hour dial. Ah, *las tres!* Again she opens up her fan to thirty sticks, this time resting the fan on the back of her right hand. Ah, *las tres y media!* He has it! Three-thirty, the hour of yespers; he will meet her in the Church of San Sebastian on the following Friday afternoon.

Naturally the *joven* has been sending rapturous return replies. As the accompaniment of his straight cut style of trousers, slim waisted and broad hatted, he also carries a small type of fan similar to the larger form, the prerogative of the signaling *senorita*.

This is the Spanish fashion in fans. The fan of the *senorita* is the large size, the fan of the *senora* somewhat smaller and the smallest the fan of the *senor*. Then there are fans for summer and winter, fans for all sorts and classes of functions—weddings, funerals, to walk out with, for the house, the city, the country and the bullfight the latter decorated with flashing scenes in the arenas, portraits of favorite reigning matadors, the "Bombas" and "Chicos" and their gay cuadrillas.

The most important of Spanish fan makers is a house of ancient lineage in Valencia, its product selling from half a peseta to five hundred pesetas, ten cents to a hundred dollars. Parchment paper fans are most in vogue, gayly painted. Large fans are used by ladies as attenuated sun shades. The men carry their



the music of and run the physical gamut of the five great emotions—love and hate, joy and grief, and fear. That is if you are a Spanish *senor* or *senora* or a sophisticated *senorita* (and the flapper does exist in Spain also).

Believe me, the shorthand of the type-writing office is but first reader stuff compared to this double-cross swirling of this classic weapon of coquetry and its involved speech of the bepowdered fingers of a mantilla veiled *senorita*. Seemingly indolent, she can manipulate her fan so vigorously that its dictation speed would leave far behind the most rapid silk stockinged, peekabooed and rouged *dactylite* (they call them that in the high class specialty shops on Fifth avenue right now).

The Spanish men are equally proficient as their women, so naturally it becomes a matching up game.

The cult of the fan comes from the East, where warm weather and most other things have come from; is as old as the world and has been put to as many uses as life itself. The Chinese claim to have originated the fan in its long flutterings through the ages.

There was once a powerful and potent nodding mandarin, red crested, yellow jacketed and peacock feather embroidered, high in court circles of the Celestial Kingdom. He had a daughter, beautiful as all beauty, almond-eyed, skin like cream, charming as a little Ming porcelain figurine. Her name was Kan-si.

It was the night of the Great Feast of the Lanterns, the heat suffocating. Suffocating, too, were the poor little Chinese maidens, forced by etiquette to wear masks in public. Kan-si rebelled, daintily but firmly, and set a new fashion. She took off her mask. But, like most reformers, she found that she would have to compromise. This she did by moving her mask rapidly before her face, so that her beautiful features might not dazzle too completely a bewildered public.

Thus she saved her face, and also discovered that she was creating a refreshing movement of air around her. Naturally, as a leader of her set she was followed by the other ladies of her immediate circle, the smart set of which she was the *animateur*. Immediately they, too, made fans of their



fans in their vest pockets or up their sleeves, but in warm weather they seldom leave their owners' hands, particularly at the hour that the *novias* appear on their grilled balconies or take their daily walks in palm lined *plazas*. The whirling of fans in the all but stagnant air at this moment is like the winged passage of many birds.

I have the secret at last! The fan is

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